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Decisions, decisions

MONTREAL — The same man (me) who brought you Ohio State in the Rose Bowl, DePaul in the NCAA tournament and James Sanford in the 100-meter dash now gives you the Defective Scorecard. I scored the welterweight title bout 147-146 in favor of the Ray Leonard, though I must say that only six ringside cards that I could account for out of 600 agreed with that addition.

Scoring fights is extremely difficult, very individual and almost unalterably subjective. A lot of it has to do with the angle from which you see the fight. A lot of it is preference of style. I go with the boxer, usually. An East Coast columnist always goes with the puncher. He thinks Muhammad Ali lost all three fights to Joe Frazier. I think Ali won them all. The perfectly objective scorer would be somewhere in between.

They say aggression was the criterion on which Roberto Duran claimed the championship. Fittingly, aggression is a key point among western fight judges. As far as punishment dished out and avoided goes, it was as dead even a fight as you will ever see. But Duran moved forward for nearly the entire bout, excepting Leonard's control of the final two rounds. But Duran boxed as much as he was the aggressor, and it was his defensive tactics, I thought, which made him the victor. It is still an art of defense, not attack.

You may want to understand more about scoring a fight. The 10-point-must system holds that the winner of a round must receive 10 points. The loser should get nine, unless he is run out of the ring. Then he gets an eight. At least, that's how most professional judges do it. But at ringside Friday night, some media types were giving eights to the loser of a round. It didn't look that one-sided. I even heard one writer scored a round 10-6! Anyway, a 147 total means the fighter scored 10 in 12 of 15 rounds, nine in the rest. Both fighters can score 10s in the same round, as Leonard-Duran did eight times on my card.

Long Division

Bob Arum and Don King should get down on their knees and salaam to the 147-pounders who are keeping boxing (and promoters) afloat. Do you know who the light-heavy champions are? Do you know who beat John Tate Friday night? Do you care about Larry Holmes? Is Jim Watt a lightweight or an inventor?

The cluster of Duran, Leonard, Wilfred Benitez, Pipino Cuevas (WBA champ) and Tommy Hearns provide the fistic interest for the majority. They are largely personable and have definitive styles that fans associate with. Leonard, the master boxer. Duran, the bludgeon. Cuevas, the attacker. Hearns, the octopus. Benitez, the counterpuncher. All of them are more complete than labeled, as Duran and Leonard ably demonstrated.

After the fight, Benitez (who is romantically linked with one of Ray Leonard's sisters), called Duran out in Spanish. He wants a title shot. But it doesn't seem that Benitez will get a chance to reclaim the title right away. Duran's best course would be to fight a tune-up fight, get some rest, then defend against Leonard in a rematch that would be richer than the first bout. Roberto doesn't have many paydays left. He must take advantage.

What can Benitez do? Well, he's the youngest of the five at only 21, so he could probably wait them all out. Hearns will fight any of the other four, but none of them seem to be in a hurry to toe against the Motor City Cobra because he represents the biggest physical threat and the least monetary (gate) return.

A Hearns-Cuevas fight would seem to be a natural, but Cuevas is also dickering to fight Duran. None of them can draw Leonard's gate, however. It could take two or three years for one of the five to establish that he is the best fighter. And it could be that there is not a best fighter among them. One might be better than another, but less than the third. Boxing, you see, is a matter of styles.

Aftermath

There were no dirty tactics in the championship fight, and it was one of the greatest in history, matched recently only by Ali-Frazier 1 and III among bouts I have seen. Undoubtedly, it was the best athletic event I've witnessed.

Duran and Leonard hit each other with punches that would have shattered lesser men. From the 10th round on, they stayed within three feet of each other, banging low and high, with neither being able to punch without an answer of some kind from the other fighter. As one English writer said, "It was the Fight of the Decade. Pick a decade."

Still, Leonard's tactics were very questionable. Perhaps he and his corner thought it was the best way to beat Duran, to fight in close with him and go to his body early. Perhaps Leonard tired of all the nonsensical talk about his lack of heart and decided to show people he had what it took. Whatever, it was fine by Roberto, who did not have to suffer through much long-range jabbing by the former champion from Palmer Park.

The boxers were so finely conditioned and so sound of mind and chin that there were no knock-downs despite the hundreds — perhaps thousands — of punches thrown.

Some said that Leonard gained respect even in losing, and it is true that Ali was not thought of as a fighter who could take punishment until his first loss at the hands of Frazier. The Ali-Leonard parallels will not go away.

A rematch is usually a tiring exercise. If it comes to it, this one would not be. Just these two men in the ring is a perfect, natural classic, just like Ali and Frazier. They bring out the very best in each other and in the science of boxing. If you don't believe me, watch the replay June 28. You too will be amazed.

Duran fined but keeps purse

From Tribune wire reports

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NEW ORLEANS — Roberto Duran, who literally may have bitten off more than he could handle by overeating before his World Boxing Council welterweight fight with Sugar Ray Leonard, was fined \$7,500 by the Louisiana Boxing Commission Wednesday for an "unsatisfactory performance."

Duran quit his welterweight championship fight with Leonard on Tuesday night in the eighth round, complaining of stomach cramps.

Duran checked out of a New Orleans hospital Wednesday after doctors tried to determine the nature of the "cramps" he blamed for his quitting.

Dr. Jack Ruli, who examined the boxer after an eight-hour stay at Baptist Hospital, said Duran was fined but had apparently suffered from acute gastritis—inflammation of the intestine or stomach.

Ruli said Duran's food intake after meeting WBC weight requirements may have contributed to his problems in the ring.

Duran immediately downed a large bowl of beef consomme and a pitcher of hot tea, Ruli said. Two hours later, at 1 p.m., he went to a steak house and devoured two T-Bones and french fries along with orange juice and hot tea.

And at 5 p.m., just four hours before the scheduled starting bell, Duran finished off another streak at his hotel, with hot tea and cold water, Ruli said.

Promoter Don King, however, stopped short



AP

Roberto Duran enjoys a big breakfast.

of saying Duran had cheated ticket-holders by eating so much.

"I don't know if that's that case or not," King said. "He just likes to eat."

The state commission collected the \$7,500 fine Wednesday night and released Duran's \$8 million purse from the fight, said commissioner Otis Guichet.

As soon as Duran turned his back on Leonard in the eighth round, the commission moved to hold up payment of the Panamanian's share of the take.

King said Wednesday, however, that Duran's paycheck had been turned over to him before the fight and that some or all of the money had already been deposited in a bank in Panama. A letter of credit for the entire purse reportedly has already been placed in the bank.

The fighter's financial adviser confirmed the money had been paid and removed from the United States in advance.

"The money was already in Panama before the fight, so I am not worried about the money," said Carlos Elea. "I am worried about how he fought in this fight. I could not figure out how it happened."

There was a published report out of Washington that the International Revenue Service was probing the financial deal between Duran and King.

The Washington Post said it learned Tuesday night that Duran's share of the purse to be paid

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by the Louisiana State Athletic Commission was \$3.5 million, half of Leonard's share, and not the \$8 million that Duran reportedly was to earn.

An IRS spokesman said the agency was prohibited by law from commenting on any investigation and was not even permitted to confirm or deny whether an investigation was being conducted. Only when such an investigation goes before the U.S. Tax Court does it become a public matter.

Discovered resting at his hotel, Duran waved away reporters with a few mumbled words of Spanish and refused to answer or acknowledge questions concerning the commission's attempt to delay his pay day.

Leonard, returning to Baltimore-Washington International Airport, told an enthusiastic, shoving crowd of about 50 fans, relatives and friends and a flock of reporters that he had beat Duran with his mind, not his fists.

"I beat the 'Hands of Stone.' I studied him, I researched him. I fought a mental fight and I beat him with my mind.

"In the third and fourth rounds, I looked into Duran's so-called 'devilish eyes' but he was confused.

"By the seventh round, I just did what came naturally. I had his mind by then," Leonard said.

When asked whether he thought if the Panamanian had given up in the eighth round, Leonard said: "I do, but with all the talk now I think he took the worst way. I think he did what he thought was best and gave up."

"I'm retiring from boxing now,"

said Duran. "I don't want to fight any more." Through at age 29 with a record of 72-2, including 55 knockouts.

There was one bit of ominous news for Duran Wednesday. Panamanian strongman Omar Torrijos reportedly ordered Duran and his entourage to return home to Panama immediately without making a planned stop in New York.

Said Duran handler Ray Arcel: "I wouldn't want to be with him when he gets off that plane."

Arcel, 81-year-old trainer, who with 73-year-old Freddie Brown, helped make Duran one of the dominant fighters of the 1970s also said, "I'm through with boxing. I will never work with boxing again even if Duran returned. I don't know what happened. I know he (Duran) would have continued if he could have."

General Torrijos wasn't the only Panamanian left to puzzle out what happened.

People in the streets in Panama City were speechless and astounded by the fight's surprising ending in the eighth round, and few wanted to comment.

Panama City, where Duran lived as a hero since he won the title from Leonard in Montreal last June, was filled with joy and confidence at the start of the evening but there was silence by the time the night ended.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, World Boxing Association convention members said Duran did not help the sport by quitting cramps or no cramps.

Several said Duran's poor showing was as big a disappointment for the boxing world as Muhammad Ali's ill-fated fight against Larry Holmes.